DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 389 371 JC 960 016

AUTHOR Johnson, Emily J.; Sullivan, Sara M.
TITLE Thinking Critically and Understanding Empathically: Techniques for Teaching Adolescent Development.
PUB DATE Mar 95
NOTE 12p.; In: Teaching of Psychology: Ideas and Innovations. Proceedings of the Annual Conference on Undergraduate Teaching of Psychology (9th, Ellenville, NY, March 22-24, 1995); see JC 960 009.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Active Learning; *Adolescent Development; *Classroom Techniques; *Course Objectives; Critical Thinking; *Empathy; Group Activities; Higher Education; *Learning Activities; *Psychology; Role of Education; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

In an Adolescent Development course at the University of Wisconsin, La Crosse, activities are employed to encourage students to become active learners, to become critical consumers of information regarding adolescents, and to develop an empathetic understanding of adolescents and their experiences. One activity that promotes critical thinking skills involves an analysis of adolescent experience over three generations, with students interviewing individuals in different age groups and compiling reports of findings in small groups. In another activity, students critique professionally produced videos on adolescent experiences and adolescent sexuality, while other activities involve essays on adolescent sexuality and an end-of-term synthesis paper demonstrating overall knowledge and understanding of adolescents. The course also stresses the development of connected knowing, or the ability to understand and empathize with another point of view. Activities employed to promote connected knowing include asking students to reflect on personal experiences that relate to class materials, eliciting personal affective responses to test taking and to works of literature, and providing opportunities for personal interaction with individuals whose experiences reflect course content. A list of 10 teaching references including 2 films is attached. (MAB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 389 371

Thinking Critically and Understanding Empathically: Techniques for Teaching Adolescent Development

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Emily J. Johnson, Ph.D.
Sara M. Sullivan, Ph. D.

University of Wisconsin - La Crosse

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Levine

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

TC 960 016

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Thinking Critically and Understanding Empathically:
Techniques for Teaching Adolescent Development

Many students who enroll in courses such as Human Development, Child Development, or Adolescent Development do so to fulfill requirements in a field where they will have occasion to interact in a professional manner with the "target" population. These students may not be interested in pursuing the scientific study of human development at various stages, but rather are interested in learning how to apply available information to work-related settings. Psychology majors, on the other hand, may be quite interested in a more scientific understanding of human development. Teaching psychology majors along with non-majors in service courses becomes a particular challenge. This paper provides a brief theoretical rational for and description of the techniques we have used when teaching the Adolescent Development course to fulfill the needs of both these groups.

After having taught Adolescent Development for several years, we have identified three primary objectives for our students enrolled in this course: (1) to encourage students to become active in their own learning processes; (2) to provide students with the skills that will enable them to become critical consumers of information regarding adolescents and their development; (3) to provide opportunities that will foster the development of an empathetic understanding of adolescents and their experiences. This last objective is particularly important in light of the negative valence that the word "adolescence" typically elicits (Takanishi, 1993) and the misunderstandings about this age group shared by a majority of Americans, including students enrolled in our courses. These objectives emphasize the need to incorporate multiple approaches to learning in the classroom and encourage the development of more complex cognitive skills in our students.

The development of or improvement in critical thinking skills has become a major focus on many college campuses. Although variously described and measured, critical thinking typically involves the "individual's ability to interpret, evaluate and make informed judgements about the adequacy of arguments, data, and conclusions" (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991, p.118). The study of adolescence as a unique period of the life span is a relatively new science. As such, scientific theory and research as well as popular press information about adolescents has exploded over the past quarter century. As this body of knowledge has grown, earlier misconceptions of adolescence are being replaced with more accurate, yet more complex models about this period in the lifespan. However, earlier misconceptions and misunderstandings about these young people and this period of the life span continue to linger in the public mind. Therefore, the development of critical thinking skills are essential in order for students to become critical consumers of information about adolescence.

However, Clinchy (1989) argues that to focus only on separate, objective knowing (often described as critical thinking) to the exclusion of other forms of thinking and knowing is an injustice to our students. She discusses the importance of including both connected knowing and critical thinking approaches in college classrooms. "Connected knowers are not dispassionate unbiased observers. They deliberately bias themselves in favor of what they are

examining....The heart of connected knowing is imaginative attachment: trying to get behind the other person's eyes and 'look at it from that person's point of view'" (Clinchy, 1989, p. 18). It is particularly important for pre-service professional to have a non-judgmental and empathetic perspective toward their clients and/or students. Connected knowing fits within a broad body of newer research that implies the limitations of formal reasoning and detached logic based on the premises of Piagetian theory (King and Kitchener, 1994). Research on college student and adult cognitive development have identified alternative cognitive styles variously described as postformal reasoning, cognitive complexity, and reflective judgement (King and Kitchener, 1994; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991).

In addition to the focus on the above styles of thinking and knowing, our courses are largely discussion based and adhere to an active learning philosophy. Typically 40-45 students enroll in each section of Adolescent Development. Although we as the instructors do include lecture time, much of each class session involves student discussion of issues, problems, questions, case studies, etc. in both large and small groups. Research evidence suggests that discussion based classes as opposed to lecture-based are more effective when the goal of instruction is affective in nature or the development of higher-order cognitive skills such as critical thinking (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991). Below we describe several classroom activities that we use to promote critical thinking or connected knowing or both within an active learning environment. As much as possible, we provide the specific resources that we use in these activities.

Activities that promote critical thinking skills

Three Generations Assignment

One of the myths about adolescence is that they are more troubled and out-of-control than earlier generations (Levine, 1987). In this assignment students collect information from three generations of people who reflect on their adolescent experiences as a means of comparing adolescence past and present. From the "data" collected, students are asked to draw conclusions about the adolescent experience over time. Through this assignment students are also introduced to research methodology and are asked to determine the type of design, method and problems in this research project and the conclusions they can or cannot legitimately make.

> Each student will interviews three individuals, one from each age category listed below, using a questionnaire form I provide. Information you collect will include demographic, how the individual spends/t his/her time, the activities in which he/she participates(d) as an adolescent, the biggest problem or concern they face/faced and answers to a few open ended sentences such as "Teens today...." The three generations and the approximate age groupings include a "contemporary adolescent," ages 11-19; a "parent generation," ages 35-45; and a "grandparent generation" aged 60 to 75.
>
> During class time, your group will compile their data onto a summary sheet that I provide. We are interested in determining whether and how the adolescent experience of contemporary adolescents is similar to or quite different from the adolescent experience of earlier generations. We will also look for within generation variability as well as between generation

similarities. You will need to carefully study the patterns of activities, concerns, responses to the open-ended questions, and demographic information to be able to draw conclusions as to whether and/or how adolescence today may be different from past generations.

Critique of professionally produced video: KIDS OUT OF CONTROL

One of the goals of the Adolescent Development course is that students will become informed and critical consumers of information on adolescents/ce. During the early part of the semester, we spend time exploring the beliefs and myths about adolescents/ce. We also read several articles, both professional and popular press, that present various views on contemporary adolescents and students are asked to look for assumptions, evidence to support assumptions, theoretical underpinnings of assumptions etc. The following activity follows this beginning exploration into the "truth" about adolescents/ce.

You will be watching a video call "Kids Out of Control" that was aired on television a few years ago and that we now have purchased on video. After viewing this video, your small group should discuss the questions which follow. As you view this video, please keep in mind the readings you have completed and discussions we have had on topics such as myths about adolescence, the ecological model of development, media's portrayal of adolescents and adolescents from an historical and contemporary perspective. Also keep in mind the various theoretical views of adolescents, both past and present.

You are to be a critical reviewers of this video. Thinking about the topics/concepts above and the questions below should help you do a careful critique. As your group discusses the following questions, please take notes to use for your written assignment (see below).

1. What is the purpose of this program? (In responding to this question, consider who the intended audience may be, and what message(s)/information is(are) being provided to this audience.)
2. After viewing this video, what impressions about adolescents and/or adolescence are you left with?
3. In what ways is this program a misleading or unfair portrayal of adolescents/ce and/or unfair portrayal of adolescents' families?
   --What are some of the words, phrases, statements that are used that lead to misconceptions?
   --What evidence is provided to back up claims made in the program?
4. In what ways does this video fairly represent adolescents/ce and/or their families?
   --What evidence is provided that makes you believe these are valid claims or accurate information?
5. Whom might you recommend see this video? Why? OR would you recommend this video at all? Why?

Written assignment: Write a critique of this video using information gained from class discussions and your own careful reading of class material. This critique should take the form of a letter to the producers of the show or a letter to the editor of the local paper. In a critique you must back up your views/position with appropriate evidence or logical arguments. I am looking for knowledge about adolescence and your ability to make careful, selective and wise use of our class discussions and readings to date. Use your resources to convince your readers that your views are accurate (regardless of whether you agree or disagree with this program).

This assignment can also be done without the use of the video by selecting another popular press article that pertains to adolescents and that makes many assumptions about adolescents/ce. Students are asked to critique it first in group and then via a letter or editorial.

Adolescent Sexuality: What does it mean to be responsible?

The discussion of adolescent sexuality is inherent in a course on Adolescence since it is during adolescence that sexual maturation occurs accompanied by curiosity, fear, and misconceptions. As American society grapples with sex education and what directions to give to sexually mature young people, adolescents invariably get mixed messages. The following activities allow students the opportunity to begin to explore the complexities inherent in any discussion of adolescent sexuality and the difficulties involved in mandating only one course of action.

You have already read several articles discussing adolescent sexuality. We have also read and discussed the two case studies: one of the young woman who became pregnant and decided to marry the father and keep the baby and the other of the young woman who chose an abortion. Today you will see a film called "Teenage Father" about a young man who faces the consequences of his sexual activity. Use the questions listed below to guide your group's discussion following the film.

Group assignment: develop the basics of a sex education proposal that you feel will address the issues presented through the film and case studies and your readings. The sex education proposal must include (1) a statement as to why you feel a sex education program is necessary (consider using information from the film and case studies as examples), (2) the target audience, that is, the grade level for which the program is aimed; (3) the content--what should be taught; (4) the teachers--who should do the teaching and why; and (5) how you plan to include parents/guardians. You will present your proposal before a panel of judges (your peers) who will challenge you as to the whys and hows of your proposal. You need to be well prepared to respond to their questions and criticisms--making full use of all the reading and other resources available to you.

Questions to guide your discussion of the film:

1. What issues about adolescent sexuality, pregnancy, and parenthood are raised by the film?
2. Are the issues different for adolescent mothers in comparison with adolescent fathers? Explain.
3. Do you feel there really is a male "attitude" problem regarding sexuality and contraceptive use? Explain.
4. What does it mean to be responsible once you have fathered a baby? . . . become pregnant . . . become a father . . . become a mother?
5. Are there inequities in the system (in terms of rights, responsibilities, etc. of teen mothers vs. teen fathers vs. their parents)? How could these inequities be rectified? (Should they be?)
6. What short-term and long-term considerations must be given to becoming and taking on the parenting role as an adolescent? . . . must be given to giving a child up for adoption? How might these decisions affect one's sense of identity or autonomy, etc?

7. Would adolescent parents be more acceptable to society and have a greater chance of "making it" if they were married? Explain.
8. What is society's role or the community's role in helping adolescents deal with their sexuality? Once a young teen has become pregnant, what role should our society play, if any?

I have extended this assignment further through the use of a role play situation. Students in the class are asked to take on various roles from the film, the case studies or to represent the clergy, teachers, school board members or other community leaders. A school board presents the sex education proposal to the "community" and the students role play their concerns, objections, support, etc. This not only serves as an activity to foster critical thinking, but connected knowing as well.

Synthesis essay for demonstrating knowledge/understanding about adolescence/ts.

Since the students who take our courses come from a variety of majors, we try to make several applied assignments that could be used in a variety of settings. Many of our students will be working in community settings, either through schools, human service agencies or recreational programs where a working understanding of this age group and this period of the lifespan is essential for development of effective programs. By semester's end, students should be able to readily identify the major developmental issues and needs of adolescents and the role played by various contexts in influencing the adolescent experience. This assignment asks students to synthesize a great deal of information and apply it toward the development of a community program.

Final Essay Assignment: Reflect on the semester's work. What have you learned about adolescence/ts? Are you ready to apply your knowledge in the community? This is your first chance to demonstrate your integrated understanding of this period of the lifespan and of this age group. You are being interviewed for a job to work with adolescents and to design a community based program that would support and serve the developmental needs of adolescents and their families. You are being interviewed by a panel of community leaders including the superintendent of schools, the director of the community recreation program, a member of the clergy, a mental health professional and a youth counselor. You must convince this panel that you are indeed knowledgeable about adolescents and come prepared to both describe the type of program you would develop and provide the rational for it. Some of your panel members have a fair amount of knowledge about adolescents/ce and others have only been informed via the media, so they may have many misconceptions. Use the questions below to guide you as you convince the panel of your expertise and of the appropriateness of the program you propose. YOU ARE NOT TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS INDIVIDUALLY, BUT USE THEM TO GUIDE YOUR WRITING OF AN ESSAY IN PREPARATION FOR THE INTERVIEW. REMEMBER YOUR AUDIENCE. IT IS NOT ME.

1. Why is the adolescent period and the people we refer to as adolescents so misunderstood?
2. How might the developmental changes of adolescents contribute to these misconceptions?
3. How do the developmental issues of identity, autonomy, sexuality, etc. contribute to these misconceptions?
3. What are the two or three most important needs of adolescents?

4. What do adolescents need to insure healthy and relatively smooth passage into adulthood?
5. Why are both families (parents) and peers necessary for healthy adolescent development?
6. What are some of the major issues or concerns of adolescents?
7. Why are adolescents as a group such high risk-takers?
8. What role can or should our society and communities play in insuring the well-being of adolescents?

Remember, you are not only proving your expertise about adolescents by talking about them, your expertise should come through in the program you propose and the rational for that program.

Activities that promote connected knowing

Reflection on personal experiences in relation to class materials

This assignment is representative of those which encourages students to utilize class material as a catalyst for reflection on their individual experiences during adolescence. It is based on the assumption that the self awareness associated with remembering personal affective responses to adolescent phenomena encourages a more empathetic perspective towards current adolescents.

Reflections on puberty: This project focuses on individual experiences of puberty and psychosocial reactions to those experiences. In a short paper (3-4 pages, typed, double-spaced), please discuss your personal experiences as your body changed from that of a child to that of an adult, emphasizing your social and emotional responses to these experiences. The "applied views" boxes in your text (Dacey and Kenny, 1994) provide models for the types of issues that will be appropriate to include. The information found in the tables in chapter 3 might also stimulate some interesting thoughts /recollections/reflections. Your discussion should include ideas and concepts presented in the text as well as the packet material. In addition, as a conclusion, please speculate about how your own recollections might influence your future interactions with adolescents whose experiences are similar to yours.

During the class for which students have prepared personal reflections about puberty, they discuss their responses in their established discussion groups. The questions presented below provide the structure for the group interactions.

1. What physical changes and experiences associated with them were mentioned in the papers prepared by the members of your group? Which were most common? What is the "core" of pubertal changes for females? ...for males?
2. What kinds of emotional responses were discussed (e.g. pride, confusion , embarrassment)? How do these compare to the information presented in the text?
3. Were there early and late maturer in your group? What were their experiences related to these patterns of physical change? Were your experiences consistent with the data presented in the text? ...Why? ...Why not?
4. In what ways will your recollections affect your interactions with adolescents?

After the in-class discussion, students complete their reflections by individually responding to the following questions: What did I learn from the members of my group? How can I be sensitive to the concerns of pubescent adolescents?

Developing activities and experiences focused on family interaction, peer relations, religious and moral development or media influence would also provide opportunities to reflect on personal experience as a catalyst for self awareness and empathetic understanding of adolescents.

Eliciting personal affective responses

Formal operations assignment: In order to create an emotional reaction which mimics what an adolescent might experience in response to formal operational tasks presented in the middle and secondary school curriculum (and to foster in students a more thorough understanding of Piaget's conceptualization of formal operations), I administer a standard paper and pencil assessment of Piagetian formal operational thinking skills. After a quick review in which I ask the class as a whole to brainstorm everything they know about Piaget and his ideas about adolescents' thought processes, I distribute the "test". The rationale for asking students to complete these tasks is to have a basis for discussing the type of thinking skills that are characteristically "formal operational". Groups of students are instructed to begin with different items so that every item will be completed by someone.

After five to seven minutes, I ask students to interrupt their work and to spend three to four minutes reflecting in writing on their feelings as they attempted to solve the problems. Several emotional responses typically emerge from class discussion - " I feel like I did taking physics tests." "I feel like I ought to know the answer, but don't." "It makes me angry that you expect us to do this in this course on adolescent development." "I feel dumb?" "It reminds me of the SAT." " I don't care about this stuff at all so why should I try?" After this brief discussion, students begin to work on the test items in groups. The task for this group activity is to monitor their own thinking processes in order to generate a list of characteristics of their thought processes. This phase of the formal operational activity generally elicits characteristics such as abstract, hypothetical, mathematical, logical, and verbal. This list of characteristics is then used as the basis for examination of Piaget's conceptualization of adolescent and adult thinking and criticisms of these ideas.

Poetry: Short selections of poetry or other literary works can be used to elicit affective response which in turn generate a more empathetic understanding of the experiences of young people. For example, the following selection creates a sense of the embarrassment adolescents typically experience surrounding the almost universal experience of having to undress and shower for gym. This poem would be effective used in conjunction with a discussion of how to make schools more "adolescent friendly."

I love to play ball
But I hate gym.
Please don't ask me to
undress.
I'm skinny,
I'm fat,
I'm small,
I'm tall,
I have no hair,
I have too much hair,
I don't even need a bra.

Robert Ricken (1987, p. 7) .

Personal interaction with individuals whose experiences reflect course content

Panel presentations of individuals whose life experiences illustrate specific topic areas are a valuable approach for introducing students to basic information as well as powerful opportunities to understand others' experiences. This technique is especially suited to creating an awareness of the experiences and feelings of members of devalued or misunderstood segments of society whose experiences are not given extensive treatment in traditional curricular materials. Potential panel topics include lesbian, gay and bisexual teens, adolescents from "nonmainstream" cultural backgrounds, adolescent parents, women who experienced abusive relationships during adolescence, "troubled teens" (e.g., eating disorders, alcohol/drug abuse, delinquency), or youth with disabilities. In order to avoid unfocused and/or unstructured panel presentations, it is critical that both students and panel members are prepared. Typically students are responsible for reading and written assignments which focus on the panel topic, such as those samples presented below. Similarly, panel members are provided with copies of the assignment so they will be familiar with the student's background information.

Identity Formation for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth: Lesbian, gay, and bisexual adolescents have been described as "at risk and underserved." In order to foster among us an empathetic understanding of the experiences of homoaffective teens, we will have a panel of guests who are willing to discuss with us issues concerning their sexual orientation and identity formation. In preparation for this event, please complete the following assignment ....

Reading assignment: Case 8 or 12 from Adolescent Portraits (Garrod, et al., 1993)

1. As you read the case study of your choice, reflect on the following....
   A.) How are the experiences (e.g. in school, with peers, with families, with potential dating partners) of this individual similar to those of heterosexual youth?;
   B.) How are they different? (Savin-Williams reflections on Case 8 presents some analysis of these issues if you need some "thought- provokers".)
   C.) What factors put this individual "at risk"?
2. How would you respond if a teen with whom you interacted either personally or professionally "came out to you"? .. or indicates the she/he was struggling with issues related to sexual orientation?

Multicultural perspective on adolescent experiences: In order to gain a more thorough multicultural understanding of the experiences of adolescents, we will host a group of

individual from different racial/ethnic backgrounds in our class. In preparation for this opportunity, please read Case 4, 5 or 6 from Adolescent Portraits (Garrod et al., 1993). (Student generally select a case study, but occasionally I assign them.)

1. After reading your case study, write a brief response which includes:
   A.) What problem(s) did this person encounter as a minority?
   B.) What kinds of feelings did she/he have in response to being a member of a minority group
   C.) What actions or steps were taken to resolve the problem(s) they faced in order to form an identity.
   D.) How does this case relate to the information presented about identity formation among marginalized groups?

In addition to the requirements described in these sample assignments, for each panel presentation, students are also required to complete two additional tasks.

1. Preparation of a set of 5 or 6 questions based on reading material or personal interest which would be appropriate to ask panel members. Occasionally these are collected ahead of time so the instructor can prepare a set of lead questions based on students' interest. This is useful if there is a possibility that students might be uncomfortable asking their questions.

2. Preparation of a one-page written response to the panel presentation which includes a discussion of "the most important things I learned from this experience" and a response to the question - "How does it feel to be ...?"

REFERENCES

Clinchy, B. (1989). On critical thinking and connected knowing. Liberal Education, 75, 14-19.

Dacey, J. & Kenny, M. (1994). Adolescent Development. Dubuque, Iowa: Brown and Benchmark

Garrod, A., Smulyan, L., Powers, S. I., & Kilkenny, R. (1992). Adolesent Portraits: Identity, Relationships, and Challenges. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

King, P. M. & Kitchener, K. S. (1994). Developing Reflective Judgement. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Levine, S. (1987). The myths and needs of contemporary youth. Annals of the American Society for Adolescent Psychiatry, 14, pp. 48-62. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Pascarella, E. T. & Terenzini, P. T. (1991). How College Affects Students. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Ricken, R. (1987). Love Me When I'm Most Unlovable. Book Two; The Kids' View. NASSP.

Takanishi, R. (1993). Changing views of adolescence in contemporary society. Teachers College Record, 94, pp. 459-465.

TEACHING RESOURCES

Kids Out of Control. (1990) Films for the Humanities and Sciences, Distributor.

Teenage Father. (1978). Children's Home Society of California, producers. 16mm film available through Instructional Media Services, West Allis, WI